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Walter Eckstein

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THE RELIGIOUS ELEMENT IN SPINOZA'S PHILOSOPHY

WALTER ECKSTEIN

I

A FEW years ago the late English jurist and Spinoza scholar, Sir Frederick Pollock, published a short biography of Spinoza in which he made the remark that Spinoza in the course of the years had been called by many and inconsistent bad names; "only," he added, "the charge of atheism, constantly flung at him in the eighteenth century, has gone out of fashion." It seems, however, that in this last observation Pollock was too optimistic. For it is this very charge of atheism which constitutes the main content of a recently republished book, *Spinoza and Religion* by Elmer E. Powell.¹ The thesis of this book is that Spinoza, an atheist at heart, was dominated in all his actions by an excessive timidity and that it was this timidity which caused him to cloak his atheistic philosophy in the phraseology of religion. It was this timidity which determined him to publish his *Theological-Political Treatise* anonymously and to adjure his friends in his first delineation of his own philosophy, in his *Short Treatise on God, Man and His Well-Being*, to be cautious in communicating his philosophical ideas to other people. Had not he even engraved the word "Cautious" on his seal ring? Powell calls this "a signifi-

cant fact, well illustrating how great a role prudence played in his life." It was this prudence and timidity, according to Powell, that induced Spinoza to conceal his real opinions when dealing with people with religious interests and even to express religious views though they were diametrically opposed to his own.

Moreover, in Powell's opinion, Spinoza was a person in whom sentiment found little place. "The claims of the creative imagination were allowed neither in his life nor in his system." He had no interest in art, and "the most beautiful creations of poetry such as Ariosto's 'Roland' were for him mere trumpery (*nugae*)." In quoting these latter remarks from Freudenthal, Powell comes to the conclusion that evidently to expect to find in Spinoza a strong religious interest would be as unwarrantable as to look for lilies at the North Pole. But—to take this last point first—has anyone ever come to a similar conclusion with regard to Plato? And did not Plato speak of Homer in a much more depreciative way? And did he not also consider the essence of all art to be imitation, which to him meant something very base? Yet who would deny that Platonism was one of the constituents of Christian theology from Augustine to modern times.

As to the charge of timidity, one must

¹ Boston, 1941.

say that Powell's arguments are by no means convincing. It was really the rule in Spinoza's time to publish books on political and religious subjects anonymously, particularly when they dealt with such controversial subjects as did the *Theological-Political Treatise*. Moreover, as J. G. Prat in the Preface to his French translation of the *Treatise* suggests, it may be true that one of the reasons which induced Spinoza to publish the book without his and the publisher's name on the title-page was the intention to protect his publisher, Jan Rieuwertsz.

On the other hand, the warning in the *Short Treatise* not to spread the doctrines of this book indiscriminately among strangers was certainly an act of caution which, as the general outburst against the *Theological-Political Treatise* proved, seems to have been entirely justified.

Even less conclusive is the argument taken from the inscription on Spinoza's signet ring. The Spinoza scholar, Carl Gebhardt, has pointed out that the meaning of this inscription is quite different from what Powell's interpretation would suggest.² The seal shows a rose surrounded by the letters *B.D.S.*—for *Benedictus de Spinoza*—and the Latin word *Caute*. Upon closer inspection one realizes that the rose has some extraordinarily long thorns. Thus the picture on the seal must have reminded the Latin-speaking reader of Spinoza's own name, as in Latin a thorny rose would be *Rosa spinosa*. Moreover, it seems obvious that the warning implied in the word *Caute* was not intended for the writer of the letter on which the seal was to be impressed but for the addressee. He read the seal: "Beware of Spinoza; he is thorny."³

² Carl Gebhardt in *Chronicon Spinozanum*, IV, 265 ff.

³ I am indebted to Professor John T. McNeill for having drawn my attention to the Scottish

Thus the real meaning of the seal would not indicate any timidity on Spinoza's part but rather testify to his courage and his willingness to fight for his convictions.

There is other evidence in Spinoza's life to support this interpretation of his character. We hear that when the brothers De Witt, whose liberal politics had been the object of Spinoza's wholehearted approval and admiration, were brutally murdered by a frenzied mob, Spinoza's landlord had to lock the door of the house to keep Spinoza from publicly protesting against the savage deed. His biographer, Colerus, tells us that he saw or rather possessed a book of drawings made by Spinoza; among them was a self-portrait of Spinoza, representing him in the costume of Masaniello, the head of the rebels of Naples, who led his people against the Spaniards and who, as Gebhardt once put it, represented to the seventeenth century the genius of revolution.

As a young man cut off from his family and from his religious community and yet, through all his life, preserving his inner unperturbedness and steadfastness, Spinoza came very close to that Stoic ideal of the sage which he himself has renewed in his *Ethics* under the name of the Free Man. He was in his later years exposed to all kinds of dangers. The *Theological-Political Treatise*, with its very liberal views—liberal even for the Netherlands, the freest country of Europe—was forbidden by one church synod after another and finally even by the public authorities of Holland. Its author, who had been very soon discovered, was menaced with personal persecution, particularly after William III came to power.

motto, *Nemo me impune lacessit*, which accompanies the representation of the thistle. Apparently this is a similar "talking coat of arms."

Moreover, the shadow of illness had hung over Spinoza's life a long time before he died at the early age of forty-four years. He had been suffering from tuberculosis, an illness which his physician said, in a letter to Leibniz, Spinoza had inherited from his mother.⁴ He had been in ill-health and suffering from occasionally recurring fever while still in Voorburg, and a year before his death he used in a letter to Tschirnhaus the phrase "si vita suppetit," apparently doubting that he would have many years to live. And though he must have known how serious his illness was, as he had studied medicine quite thoroughly—his library contained all the medical books necessary for a practicing physician at that time—he seems to have realized in his own life the maxim of the Free Man, of whom he says in his *Ethics* that he is never led by the fear of death: "A Free Man thinks of nothing less than of death and his wisdom is a meditation not on death but on life." We know that during his illness Spinoza never complained of his suffering and that none of his friends, not even his landlord, to whom he spoke on the very day of his death, was aware of the seriousness of his illness.

In view of all these facts and of the

⁴ The physician, Schuller, in his letter of February 6, 1677. Schuller says there that the illness was growing worse from day to day. Though modern medicine does not believe in the hereditability of tuberculosis, it may well be that Spinoza had been infected in early childhood by his mother. His mother, Hannah Deborah, died when Spinoza was only six years old. Carl Gebhardt once remarked in personal conversation to the writer of this article that it was unusual for a woman at the time to have a middle name. He thought that "Deborah" (meaning "bee," like the Greek "Melitta") had been the real name and that during her illness the name "Hannah" (meaning "grace") had been given to her in order to make her unrecognizable for the angel of death, a custom still practiced among Eastern Jews. Gebhardt concluded from this hypothesis that Spinoza's mother had been seriously sick long before she died.

spirit of his philosophy, we would rather side with Carl Gebhardt, who considers courage and virility the essential features of Spinoza's character. And we are inclined to think that Sir Frederick Pollock was right when in his address at the tercentenary celebration of Spinoza's birth in 1932 he quoted—referring to Spinoza's character—from Horace's famous ode the two opening stanzas which end:

... si fractus inlabatur orbis
inpauidum ferient ruinae.

II

As to Spinoza's alleged irreligiosity, it has been suggested above that in this respect the general conception of Spinoza's philosophy has greatly changed since the latter part of the eighteenth century. Since the time when Goethe wrote to his friend Jacobi that to him Spinozism and atheism were two entirely different things and that he would rather call Spinoza *Theissimum* and *Christianissimum*, when Herder spoke of him as the "holy Spinoza," and Novalis gave him that famous epithet of "the God-intoxicated man"—since that time innumerable voices have been raised in a similar vein. It has been more and more recognized that the very roots of Spinoza's philosophy lie in his ethical and religious interest. To find a position with regard to the course of the world and the fate of man which at the same time would give us strength and freedom from suffering—this, in the opinion of a recent philosopher, was the real leitmotiv of Spinoza's thought.⁵ His philosophy has been called a rationalized religion,⁶ and Spinozism

⁵ Robert Reiniger, *Philosophie des Erkennens* (Leipzig, 1911), p. 68.

⁶ Wilhelm Wundt, *Ethik* (Stuttgart, 1912), II, 113.

has been characterized as a doctrine of salvation.⁷

How far are such contentions justified? There can be no question that the *Short Treatise on God, Man and His Well-Being* as well as the *Tractatus de intellectus emendatione* start on a religious note. In the *Short Treatise*, which may be considered the first draft of his own philosophy, Spinoza reveals the real object of his philosophic system: it is the union with God in which real beatitude lies. This union is based upon the right kind of understanding which brings with it the love of God.⁸

The right idea of God is the goal which in his *Short Treatise* Spinoza craves with a zeal characteristic of the religious mystic: "However, I tell you this, that so long as we have not such a clear idea of God as shall unite us with him in such a way that it will not let us love anything beside him, we cannot truly say that we are united with God so as to depend immediately on him."⁹ And we find almost exactly the same attitude in his *Tractatus de intellectus emendatione*. In the famous introductory chapter which contains the only passage in Spinoza's writings that has a biographical and almost confession-
al tinge¹⁰ he speaks of the supreme good,

⁷ Gabriel Huan, *Le Dieu de Spinoza* (Arras, 1913), p. 7; cf. also David Bidney, *The Psychology and Ethics of Spinoza* (New Haven, 1940), p. 45.

⁸ *Tractatus brevis*, II, 22 (*Opera*, I, 100 ff.). All the quotations refer to volumes and pages of Gebhardt's Heidelberg, 1926, edition of *Spinoza Opera* (4 vols.). The *Ethics* is quoted only by parts and propositions.

⁹ *Tract. brev.*, I, 2, "Second Dialogue" (*Opera*, I, 34). The translation is by A. Wolf of Spinoza's *Short Treatise on God, Man and His Well-Being* (1910), p. 40.

¹⁰ The genuine character of this confession has been questioned, as it seems to follow certain traditional patterns. It may be particularly noticed that Spinoza himself in one of his letters (*Epist. XLIII*) emphasizes that he never had been inter-

ested in gaining wealth. Particularly Lewis Robinson, in his *Kommentar zu Spinozas Ethik* (Leipzig, 1928), pp. 48 f., propounds the theory that this whole passage is a variation of a scholastic theme; he refers to Heereboord, *Exerc. ethicae*, Vol. IV, and Aristotle *Eth. Nic.* i. 5. Cf. also the remarks about fame, pleasure, and wealth by Angelus Silesius, reprinted in Carl Gebhardt, *Spinoza, Vom Wege der Erkenntnis mit Versen des Angelus Silesius* (Frankfurt, 1927).

the *summum bonum*, which he began to visualize while still a young man and which, as he then discovered, was the only remedy against the threefold temptation of wealth, pleasure, and fame. As against the love of these things, which are perishable, he praises the love toward a thing eternal and infinite—a love which alone feeds the mind with joy and therefore is free from all sadness and which is much to be desired and to be sought out with all our power. And here again he hints at the essence of this supreme good, namely, the knowledge of the union which the mind has with the totality of nature.

In the *Short Treatise* Spinoza's language is in almost the same vein as the writings of his Collegiant friends such as Pieter Balling and Jarig Jelles.¹¹ Balling, too, thinks that love toward perishable things and union with them are likely to rob man of his happiness and that salvation is to be found only in the union with God. As Jelles does in his treatise, so Spinoza calls the intellect a son and immediate creature of God and characterizes the union with God as a rebirth of man. It is the language of the liberal

¹¹ Balling's *Het Licht op den Kandelaar* has been reprinted by Carl Gebhardt in *Chronicon Spinozanum*, Vol. IV. Cf. also Gebhardt, "Die Religion Spinozas," *Archiv für Geschichte der Philosophie*, XLI, 333 ff. which deals particularly with Spinoza's relation to the Collegiants. Both Balling and Jelles seem to have been influenced by Spinoza; on the other hand, the *Short Treatise* was probably translated into Dutch and revised by Balling and Jelles, respectively.

protestant sects of his time which Spinoza uses. He speaks of the lovely bonds of God's love which constitute real freedom for man, and he identifies God and truth in a way that reminds us of the religious tradition out of which Spinoza had come.¹²

And yet even in these early writings we cannot fail to recognize the intellectualist character of Spinoza's religion. "True belief," we read in the *Short Treatise*, "is good only because it is the way to true knowledge, and awakens us to things which are really worthy of love." And, he adds: "The final end that we seek and the highest that we know is true knowledge."¹³ This brings us to the very core of Spinoza's religiosity. Already in his *Short Treatise* knowledge and beatitude are inseparable.¹⁴ It is true, Spinoza uses theological language, but his God is entirely different from the God of orthodox theology. He probably means this when at the end of the *Short Treatise* he warns his friends not to dismiss his new teachings and to be aware of the fact that a doctrine does not cease to be true for not being accepted by many people. In a letter to Oldenburg which was written while Spinoza was working on his *Treatise on*

the Improvement of the Understanding, he expects the theologians to find fault with this work because he did not separate God and nature in the way all had done of whom he knew. He therefore cannot have been surprised when, many years later, Hugo Boxel replied to a letter in which Spinoza had explained the nature of God as he saw it with the famous words: "Tuum Deum ignoro."

III

What in particular were these distinctive features of Spinoza's conception of God? In the first place, in all his writings, particularly however in his *Ethics*, Spinoza is anxious to remove from this conception all features of anthropomorphism. He is opposed to the multitude, which imagines God a mighty king and identifies his might with the might or the right of rulers (*Ethics*, Part II, prop. 3, schol.). In one of his letters (*Epist.* XXIII) he says explicitly that theologians usually picture God as a perfect man and therefore attribute to him certain wishes and think that he dislikes the deeds of the bad ones and feels pleasure about the acts of the righteous; but philosophy must not attribute to God those qualities which would constitute a perfect human being. Neither must we imagine that God could change his decisions or that he could arbitrarily prevent those things from happening which necessarily follow from his nature (*Ethics*, Part I, prop. 33, and Schol. I and II; *ibid.*, Part I, Appen.). In short, Spinoza's God "is not the God of psalmist or prophet or apostle, whose wisdom is full of mercy and whose loving-kindness is better than life."¹⁵

Spinoza's God has no "personality." There can be no doubt that those who

¹² The identification of God and truth as well as the evaluation of love according to its object occurs in talmudic writings as well as in Christian medieval mystic literature, in the latter particularly with reference to John 14:6.

¹³ *Tract. brev.*, II, 4 (*Opera*, I, 61); Wolf, *op. cit.*, p. 76.

¹⁴ Cf. St. Dunin Borkowski, *Spinoza nach dreihundert Jahren* (Berlin, 1932), p. 18: "Erkenntnis und Glück fließen hier bereits restlos ineinander." Cf. also the same author's *Spinoza*, II (Münster, 1933), 352, where he stresses the importance of understanding the *Ethics* in the light of the *Short Treatise* and refutes the insinuation that Spinoza "cautiously and cunningly cloaked a naked naturalism and materialism in the garment of theism"—an opinion which was possible only as long as one did not know Spinoza's world well enough and tried to explain the *Ethics* only by itself or to transpose it by means of modern conceptions.

¹⁵ Thus W. R. Sorley, "Spinoza," *Proceedings of the British Academy* (London, 1917-18), p. 497.

we were dealing with lines, planes, and bodies. Good and bad are only other expressions for our likes and dislikes; they are, as our conceptions of order and disorder, beauty and ugliness, nothing but modes of thought.

These are some of the objections raised against what may be considered the presuppositions of an ethical or religious attitude on the part of Spinoza. If Spinoza's system were really the negation of every ethical norm or rather every value in general, then the charge of fatalism and amorality would seem entirely justified.²³

IV

It is, however, by no means true that Spinoza's conception of God or nature is really deprived of every aspect of value. It must be admitted that Spinoza repeatedly rejects the idea of order or disorder, of good or bad, as applied to nature. But his argument is mainly directed against a certain anthropocentrism which he found in theological and philosophical speculations of his time. What Spinoza combats is the idea that the universe is made for man's sake. Not only is there no reason to assume that nature should have a tendency to satisfy our needs, including our desires for order and beauty, but we have no right to think of God as having certain ends outside himself. In his *Cogitata metaphysica* Spinoza speaks of the impossibility of God's having any

²³ The writer of this article in two papers, published at the occasion of the three hundredth anniversary of Spinoza's birth, has tried to show that the attacks directed against the possibility of a normative ethics and a philosophy of law in Spinoza's system are unjustified and that the idea of duty as well as that of law have their place in his philosophy (cf. "Die rechtsphilosophischen Lehren Spinozas im Zusammenhang mit seiner allgemeinen Philosophie," *Archiv f. Rechts- und Wirtschaftsphilosophie* [1933], Vol. XXVI, and "Zur Lehre vom Staatsvertrag bei Spinoza," *Zeitschrift f. öffentliches Recht*, Vol. XIII [1933]).

aims or ends and yet he seems to imply that there may be certain aims intrinsic in God.²⁴ In other words, what Spinoza rejects seems to be any kind of transcendent teleology, not immanent teleology.

Moreover, it must be obvious to any reader who attempts to rethink Spinoza's philosophy²⁵ that Spinoza's system is based upon the idea of an eternal world order. This *aeternus ordo totius naturae*²⁶ is the common order of nature to which man, being a part of it, is subjected in just the same way as any other part. This conception is basic to Spinoza's philosophy already in that first phase which for us is represented by his *Short Treatise*. McKeon says with reference to this work:

There is here a conception of the universe which supposes an essential ordering of things. One of the fundamental convictions of Spinozism is here in the First Part of the *Short Treatise*: there is never a hesitation or a doubt concerning the reality and the intelligibility of a suprasensible order in nature; that order, in

²⁴ *Cogit. met.*, Part II, cap. x (*Opera*, I, 268 f.): ". . . quia nempe si Deus aliquem finem sibi praefixit, ille sane non fuit extra Deum; nihil enim extra Deum datur, a quo ipse incitetur ad agendum." Cf. the famous passage against final causes in the Appendix to Part I of the *Ethics*.

²⁵ H. F. Hallett, "Some Recent Criticisms of Spinoza," *Mind*, 1942, p. 134, makes the following excellent remark, which might as well be directed against a book such as Powell's: "Acquaintance with the writings of a philosopher, however extensive and accurate it may be, does not seem to me a sufficient basis to work upon: this must be supplemented and corrected by a sympathetic rethinking and development of his speculation, and especially where its categories lie outside of current modes of philosophical thought."

²⁶ *De intellectus emendatione*, II, 12 (*Opera*, II, 8); cf. *Ethics*, Part I, prop. 33, and dem.; *ibid.*, Part II, prop. 7, schol. About man's subjection under the common order of nature see *Ethics*, Part III, Preface; Part IV, prop. 4, coroll.; Part IV, prop. 57, schol.; and, further, *ibid.*, Part II, prop. 30, dem.; Part I, prop. 11, Dem. II. Cf. *Tractatus theologico-politicus*, cap. xvi (*Opera*, III, 191), and *ibid.*, II, 8 (*Opera*, III, 279).

fact, is what constitutes Nature, not as it is evolved in things but rather as it is the source and mover of all evolution.²⁷

The idea of a *fixus et immutabilis ordo naturae* is so essential to Spinoza's philosophy in all its phases that it may well be called one of the fundamental elements of his religious outlook. In the sixth chapter of his *Theological-Political Treatise*, where he repeatedly refers to this immutable order of nature, he expressly states that any event which would destroy or break this order would make us doubtful of God and of everything and our belief in the possibility of such an event would lead us into the arms of atheism.

It is true, Spinoza says that concepts such as order and confusion are relative to our power of imagination or thinking. We speak of order or confusion, of beauty or ugliness, in proportion as things are likely to delight or disgust our senses or our imagination.²⁸ However, upon closer investigation, we realize that the kind of order which Spinoza rejects is really an external or superimposed concept of order as of an aesthetically pleasant arrangement that would delight our senses. What he, however, admits is the regular adaptation and coherence of the individual things and happenings to each other, a *cohaerentia partium*, meaning, as Spinoza explains to Oldenburg, that "the laws, or nature, of one part adapt themselves to the laws, or nature, of another part in such a way as to produce the least possible opposition."

Moreover, there can be no doubt that in Spinoza's mind a definite positive value was attached to this order of nature.

²⁷ R. P. McKeon, *The Philosophy of Spinoza* (New York, 1928), p. 69.

²⁸ *Ethics*, Part I, Appen.; *Epist.* XXX and XXXII; *Cog. met.*, I, 5.

Harald Höfding has recognized that Spinoza rejects the conception of value only where it is applied to individual, special phenomena of nature. But Spinoza himself applies it to the innermost essence and the supreme law of nature by identifying nature and God.²⁹ It has not been sufficiently realized, as far as I can see, that, in rejecting value predicates in their application to reality, Spinoza is most anxious to refute any *negative* evaluation of nature. To take only a few examples: In the *Short Treatise*³⁰ he contends that there is no confusion (*Verwarringe*) in nature, since nobody knows all the causes of things so as to be able to judge accordingly. As he does here, Spinoza in other writings also declares our lack of knowledge the real reason why we think we find imperfection in nature. But, he says in his *Theological-Political Treatise*—and again in the *Political Treatise*—whatever seems ridiculous, bad, or absurd in nature seems so only because we know things only in part. And he declares in *Epistola XXX* to Oldenburg:

I do not think it right for me to laugh at Nature, much less to weep over it, when I consider that men, like the rest are only a part of Nature and that I do not know how each part of Nature is connected with the whole of it, and how with the other parts. And I find that it is from the mere want of this kind of knowledge that certain things in Nature were formerly wont to appear to me vain, disorderly, and absurd, because I perceive them only in part and mutilated and they do not agree with our philosophic mind.

There are many passages in Spinoza's *Ethics* which express the same thought. In the Preface to the third part of the *Ethics* Spinoza stresses the fact that nothing happens in nature which could

²⁹ Höfding, *Spinozas Ethica, Analyse und Charakteristik* (Heidelberg, 1924), p. 30.

³⁰ *Tract. brev.*, I, 6 (*Opera*, I, 41).

be attributed to a fault of hers.³¹ It is only because we have inadequate ideas that we form the conception of evil.³²

It is in accordance with this rejection of all the negative value qualities in their application to nature that Spinoza attributes the highest perfection to God or substance. It is not only the old theological tradition which makes Spinoza call his God *Ens summe perfectum*. It follows from his identification of reality and perfection³³ that God (or nature), representing the highest *realitas* because his *potentia* is the highest, must necessarily be the most perfect being. For as Spinoza explains in the Appendix to the First Part of his *Ethics* the perfection of things is to be judged only by their nature or power (*potentia*).

It is clear that when Spinoza rejects the concept of perfection or rather characterizes it as a mere way of thinking and as something relative which does not explain nature in itself, he has in mind an evaluation of nature from the human point of view. In the passage just quoted Spinoza continues by saying that things are not more or less perfect because they delight or offend our senses, because they agree with human nature or are repulsive to it. As is true with regard to his concept of order, so his concept of perfection is twofold. He rejects the human, subjective concept of perfection and order, but

³¹ *Ethics*, Part III, Preface: "Nihil in natura fit quid ipsius vitio possit tribui. . . ." Cf. also *ibid.*, Part IV, Preface, and Part IV, prop. 73, schol. The translation of Spinoza's *Epist.* XXX is from *The Correspondence of Spinoza* (1928), by A. Wolf.

³² *Ethics*, Part IV, prop. 64, coroll.: "Hinc sequitur, quod si mens humana non nisi adaequatas haberet ideas, nullam mali formaret notionem"; cf. *ibid.*, Part IV, prop. 73, schol.

³³ *Ethics*, Part II, Def. VI: "Per realitatem et perfectionem idem intelligo." God is called "Ens summe perfectum" in *Ethics*, Part I, prop. 11, Dem. II, and *Epist.* II.

he admits the validity of an objective perfection as he admits the existence of order in the sense of an objective concatenation of all the parts of the universe. Perfection in this objective sense is equated by Spinoza with reality. However, as Lewis Robinson has pointed out,³⁴ even in spite of this equation, Spinoza has by no means succeeded in excluding every value tinge from the concept of perfection. Even if perfection means to Spinoza nothing but reality or being, argues Robinson, reality or being is to him the highest, the only perfection, that which is valuable, worthy of love, and divine. And Robinson refers to this passage in *Epistola* XIX: "quo enim res aliqua plus perfectionis habet, eo etiam magis de Deitate participat, Deique perfectionem exprimit magis."

These few hints may suffice to show that Spinoza's universe is by no means devoid of values. It is not the blind chaos it has been represented to be. In fact, Spinoza again and again emphasizes that in the universe there is no place for chance. The irrational, the absolute contingent would be just the opposite of the fixed and immutable order of nature in which Spinoza believes. Whoever reads Spinoza's *Ethics* with the sympathetic approach of which Hallett speaks cannot help realizing the feeling of reverence and awe shining through the sober mathematical language of this work whenever Spinoza mentions that eternal order of which we ourselves are parts.

V

The science of the Renaissance had discovered the infinity and the homogeneity of the universe. No longer was the earth the center of the world—the latter

³⁴ *Op. cit.*, p. 255.

itself limited within the Ptolemaic spheres—and no longer was there any separation between the sublunar and the sidereal realm and their respective laws. Infinity, necessity, and unity—these were the principles upon which the new world of the just arising natural sciences was based. This new world found its highest philosophic expression in Spinoza's system. The peasant in Spinoza's *Short Treatise* who for the first time discovers that there are other fields beyond the borders of his own may well be taken as a symbol of the science of the Renaissance which had left behind the limits and restrictions of Scholasticism and opened the road to wider or rather to infinite perspectives. Spinoza's philosophy presupposes this new scientific outlook and transforms it into the higher vision of a new faith. Not a faith in miracles and not a faith in some paternal providence—already in his *Short Treatise* necessity and the tendency to preserve one's own existence take the place of divine foresight—but a faith in an ultimate rationality of the world. Harald Höffding says that what Spinoza calls "substance" is the principle of an inner rational connection between all phenomena.³⁵ It was this rationality that to Spinoza seemed to guarantee at the same time the possibility of true knowledge and of man's beatitude. Man is able to understand God as he really is or to form adequate ideas of him and of all things—as far as they are understood *sub quadam specie aeternitatis*—because there is this rational order in nature. It is the logical outcome of this attitude for Spinoza to consider everything to be against reason which is against nature.³⁶

It is reason which to Spinoza opens

³⁵ "Spinoza, 1677-1927," *Chronicon Spinozanum*, V, 48.

³⁶ *Tract. theol.-pol.*, cap. vi (*Opera*, III, 91).

the way to ethical living and to that ultimate salvation for which he had been searching in his earlier writings. To him it seems the supreme ethical law to submit to that eternal order of which man is but a part and to accept cheerfully whatever it may have in store for us. Thus only may we hope to find the true happiness which, he already states in his *Theological-Political Treatise*, lies in virtue alone and in peace of mind.

It has been said that Spinoza's way of salvation, like Plato's, is the way of intellect.³⁷ The "amor Dei intellectualis" and the "vera animi acquiescentia," of which he speaks in those solemn words in which his *Ethics* ends as in a magnificent final chord, can be reached only through the right kind of knowledge. There is no other way but reason. "What altar," Spinoza exclaims in his *Theological-Political Treatise*, "could a man build himself who offends the majesty of reason!"

Some philosophers have characterized Spinoza's position as a religion of reason³⁸ or as a *religio philosophica* as opposed to a *religio mythologica*.³⁹ The essential point seems to us that Spinoza was the first to accept the results of the natural sciences of our modern time and to build upon these fundamentals the structure of a new faith which Santayana once quite appropriately called a religion of science.⁴⁰

³⁷ Thus W. G. de Burgh, "Spinoza," *Philosophy*, XI (1936), 274.

³⁸ H. A. Wolfson, *The Philosophy of Spinoza*, II, 325; cf. also Dunin Borkowski, *Spinoza*, IV (Münster, 1936), 75.

³⁹ Carl Gebhardt, "Die Religion Spinoza," *Archiv für Geschichte der Philosophie*, Vol. XLI (1932); cf. his article, "Religio metaphysica," in *Septimana Spinozana* (The Hague, 1933), pp. 134 ff.; cf. also J. Freudenthal, *Spinoza, Leben und Lehre*, ed. C. Gebhardt (Heidelberg, 1927), II, 75: ". . . seine Religion ist die Religion der Erkenntnis."

⁴⁰ G. Santayana, "The Ethical Doctrine of Spinoza," *Harvard Monthly*, II (1886), 145; cf. also "Ultimate Religion," in *Septimana Spinozana*.

Yet Spinoza's aim was not to reconcile religion to science but rather to draw the metaphysical and ethical conclusions from the scientific premises. Some of these conclusions have by no means become obsolete. Our present-day science still implicitly presupposes certain postulates with regard to the rationality of nature. Philosophers may speak, with Helmholtz, of the conceivability of nature or simply of the principle of the possibility of induction. The fact remains, as Morris R. Cohen says, that "after all nature does behave in conformity with logical and mathematical principles."⁴¹ It was this fact which represents the basis of Spinoza's faith.

One may doubt whether we have a right to call Spinoza's philosophical position religious. If one considers the belief in God as a personal being one of the essential prerequisites of religion, as E. E. Powell does, then we certainly must admit that Spinoza's philosophy was not religious. But it can hardly be denied that both his philosophy and his life show certain traits which we are accustomed to associate with the religious attitude. The peace of mind that flows from true knowledge and that accompanies the *Amor Dei intellectualis* is undoubtedly one of these traits. And there can be no question that Spinoza himself achieved that peace of mind⁴² and that to this day the reader of his *Ethics* feels that atmosphere of peace which Goethe once experienced while reading this work.

From this peace of mind, this *acquiescentia animi*, flow that courage and im-

⁴¹ *Reason and Nature* (New York, 1931), p. 226.

⁴² Cf. A. E. Taylor, "Some Inconsistencies in Spinozism," *Mind*, XLVI (1937), 289: "No one, I take it, doubts that Spinoza's own contemplation of the order of the universe brought him the serene and solemn joy which he describes."

perturbedness which are so characteristic of Spinozism. In one of his letters Spinoza says that ethics are to be based upon metaphysics and physics. In his own *Ethics* we see how from his conception of the necessity, unity, and infinity of nature follow the ethical laws which he sometimes calls divine because they seem to emanate from the necessity of nature: the ideal of the free man who not only resigns himself to his fate but actually affirms it, whose wisdom is not a meditation on death, but a meditation on life; the endeavor to understand human imperfections and frailties and to forgive them, to repay hatred, rage, and contempt with love and nobleness, for minds are conquered not by arms, but by love and magnanimity.

And there is also this other trait in Spinoza's philosophy which we might consider religious: the feeling of awe and reverence in the face of the infinity of nature of which man is but a very small part, coupled with the consciousness that it is through man's mind that nature recognizes herself: "the mental intellectual love towards God is the very love of God with which God loves Himself."

In the last analysis we may find it a matter of little importance whether we choose to call Spinoza's attitude religious or not. There will always be many who feel that Ernest Renan was not so wrong when on the occasion of the two hundredth anniversary of Spinoza's death and of the unveiling of the Spinoza monument in The Hague, he spoke these memorable words: "He, from his granite pedestal, will teach everybody the path to the beatitude he has found, and in centuries to come the civilized man who will pass through Paviljoensgracht will speak in his soul: It was perhaps from this place that God was seen most closely."